



steepet™

ed brubaker
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Sean
2003

SUGGESTED FOR
MATURE READERS

WILDSTORM.COM

EXTRACTION

There are only a few good things about my condition, my nearly non-existent nervous system.

...but there's also another advantage.

I mean, there's the whole "feeling no pain" aspect, which is both good and bad...

My mind may get anxious, but my body doesn't respond to it. My heartbeat never floods my ears. My adrenalin doesn't pump through my blood.

So, my reflexes are always fast, my hands always sure.

KRRRK

It makes thinking
on my Feet easy...



...and it means
I can move
quickly and
silently with
relative ease.



Which is
something I
really need
to do
tonight...



...because my
one chance at
freedom is
somewhere
inside these
walls, and if I
don't get to
him soon...



...I may never find my
way back to who I
used to be.





GOD DAMN
YOU, JONES... I
THOUGHT YOU
SAID YOU KNEW
WHAT YOU WERE
DOING...?

TWO WEEKS
AGO...



SATISFIED
WE'RE **UN-
OBSERVED**
NOW,
CARVER?

AS MUCH
AS I **EVER**
AM...



I WOULD'VE
BEEN MORE
THAN HAPPY
BACK AT MY
HOTEL ROOM,
WHERE IT WAS
WARM...



BAD ENOUGH I'M
EVEN **TALKING** TO
YOU... LAST THING
I NEED IS TO BE
SEEN LEAVING
YOUR HOTEL.

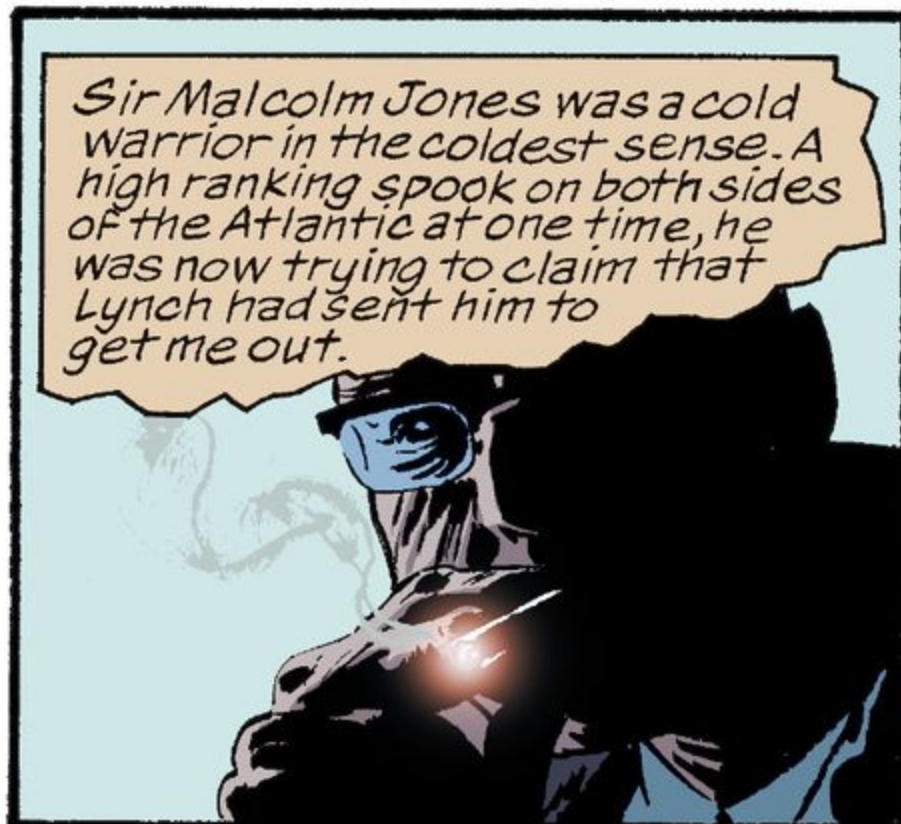
WHO **KNOWS** HOW
MANY AGENCIES'
ALARMS WENT OFF
WHEN YOU ENTERED
THE COUNTRY...



DON'T **INSULT** ME, BOY. YOU
DON'T GET TO BE **MY** AGE IN THIS
GAME WITHOUT KNOWING HOW
TO CROSS BORDERS FREELY.



Sir Malcolm Jones was a cold warrior in the coldest sense. A high ranking spook on both sides of the Atlantic at one time, he was now trying to claim that Lynch had sent him to get me out.



He knew how to contact me, and he seemed to know my whole story, that I was Lynch's deep cover operative...

But how the hell could I trust him when the only person who could verify his story was in a coma?

LOOK, I DON'T **EXPECT** YOU TO BELIEVE ME, CARVER, BUT THE SIMPLE FACT IS, I'M THE **ONLY** ONE WHO CAN HELP YOU RIGHT NOW...

...AND IF WE DON'T MOVE SOON, MY PRESENCE HERE IS LIKELY TO BE **DETECTED**. SO YOU'RE JUST GOING TO HAVE TO SUCK IT UP AND TRUST ME ANYWAY.

SO, WAS LYNCH LIKE YOUR PROTEGE OR SOMETHING?

HA... THAT'S A GOOD ONE.

NO, THAT BASTARD NEVER HAD A KIND WORD FOR ME THE WHOLE TIME I KNEW HIM...

WHY **WOULD** HE? I WAS HIS SUPERIOR. SOMEONE STANDING IN THE WAY OF HIS JOB. OR, AT LEAST THAT'S HOW HE **USUALLY** VIEWED IT.

SO, WHY THE FUCK WOULD HE TRUST **YOU** WITH INFORMATION HE NEVER TOLD **ANY-ONE** ELSE?

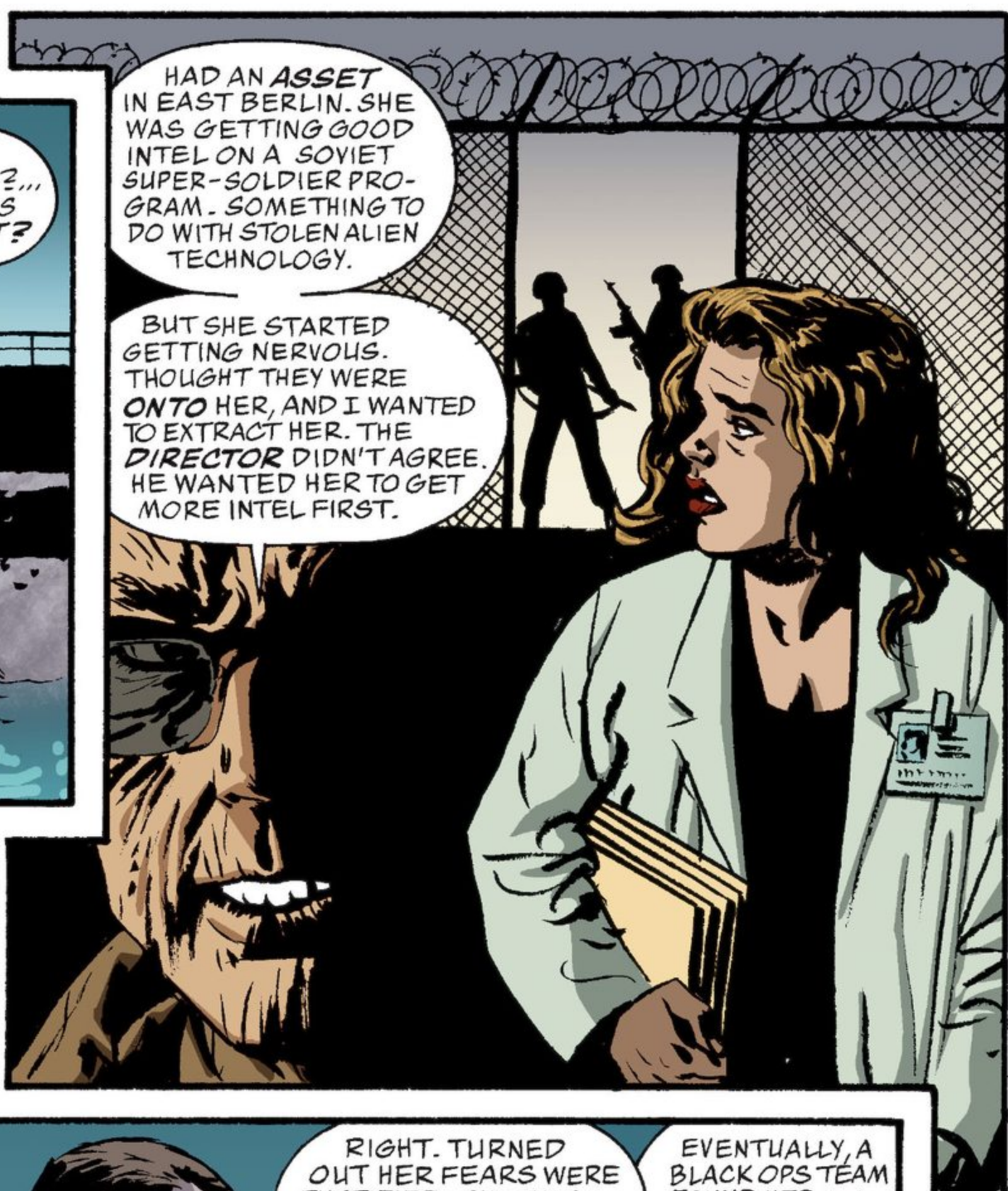
PROBABLY BECAUSE OF WHY I RE-SIGNED FROM I.O. BACK IN THE '70S.

OH, YEAH?... WHY'S THAT?



HAD AN **ASSET** IN EAST BERLIN. SHE WAS GETTING GOOD INTEL ON A SOVIET SUPER-SOLDIER PROGRAM. SOMETHING TO DO WITH STOLEN ALIEN TECHNOLOGY.

BUT SHE STARTED GETTING NERVOUS. THOUGHT THEY WERE **ONTO** HER, AND I WANTED TO EXTRACT HER. THE **DIRECTOR** DIDN'T AGREE. HE WANTED HER TO GET MORE INTEL FIRST.



JESUS... I CAN SEE WHERE **THIS** IS GOING...

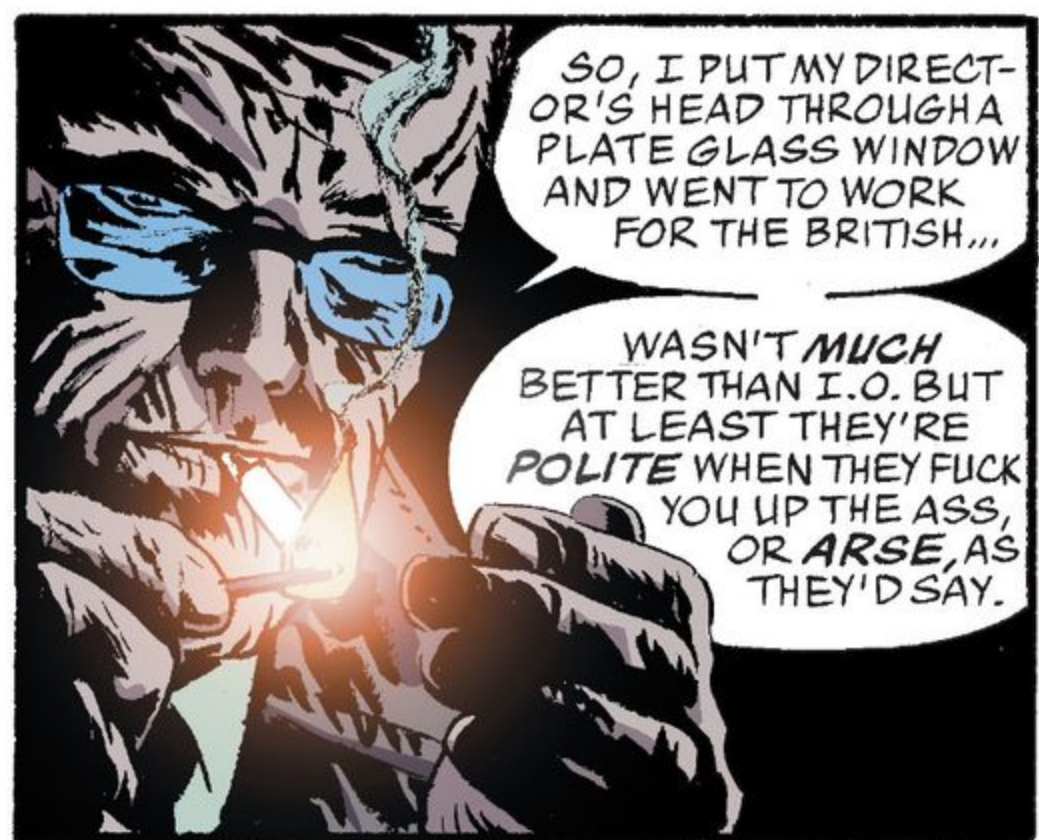
RIGHT. TURNED OUT HER FEARS WERE JUSTIFIED. SHE WAS **TAKEN** IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT A WEEK LATER...

EVENTUALLY, A BLACK OPS TEAM FOUND HER IN A CELL IN MOSCOW, BUT THERE WASN'T MUCH LEFT OF HER...



SO, I PUT MY DIRECTOR'S HEAD THROUGH A PLATE GLASS WINDOW AND WENT TO WORK FOR THE BRITISH...

WASN'T **MUCH** BETTER THAN I.O. BUT AT LEAST THEY'RE **POLITE** WHEN THEY FUCK YOU UP THE ASS, OR **ARSE**, AS THEY'D SAY.



SO, I'M LITTLE UNCLEAR
ON *HOW* YOU WERE CON-
TACTED ABOUT ME...

Heh, IT WAS PRETTY *FUNNY*, REALLY
... HERE I THOUGHT I'D DROPPED
COMPLETELY OFF THE MAP, LIVING IN
THE FUCKING YUCATAN...

"... AND THEN TWO MONTHS
AGO SOME KID WALKS UP
AND HANDS ME A MESSAGE
FROM LYNCH.

"NOT ONLY DID THAT SON
OFA BITCH KNOW WHERE I
WAS ALL ALONG, BUT HE'D
SET ME UP TO BE HIS GOD-
DAMN BACK-UP PLAN..."

"APPARENTLY, HE HAD A
COMPUTER PROGRAMMED
TO MAKE A CALL IF HE DIDN'T
LOG IN FOR SIX MONTHS. THAT
CALL GOT A LETTER DELIV-
ERED TO ME.

"AND SUDDENLY I'M RIGHT
BACK IN THE THICK OF IT,
FLYING TO BERMUDA TO
PICK UP SOME SECRET FILE
LYNCH STASHED THERE."

YOUR FILE, AS IT TURNS
OUT. PRICK DIDN'T EVEN
OFFER AN ALTERNATIVE
PLAN. JUST *ASSUMED*
I'D CLEAN UP HIS
MESS.

AND
YET,
HERE
YOU
ARE...

HERE
I AM.

AND WHAT A
FUCKING MESS
IT IS...

Over the next week, I have two more clandestine meetings with Sir Malcolm Jones.

When I'm with Tao and the other Prodigals, he's busy laying the groundwork for bringing me in, for clearing me.

Lynch's file on me is stashed in a safe place again, he assures me, and contains more than enough evidence to prove that everything I've done was under orders.

But Jones needs to get this evidence in front of the right people, and it has to be people he trusts.

I'm not as trusting as Jones' is, so he doesn't reveal my identity to the Friends he contacts. Just tells them he has an asset that needs to be extracted.

Still, I worry that him appearing out of the ether and contacting old friends will raise enough eyebrows to cause us both a world of trouble...

...and by the middle of the next week, it becomes clear that my fears were right on the money...

HIS NAME IS **SIR MALCOLM JONES**, ONE-TIME ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS, AND AFTER THAT, A CONSULTANT FOR M16 IN ENGLAND.

HE'S BEEN MISSING FOR OVER TEN YEARS, UNTIL **LAST WEEK**.



PERHAPS YOU CAN TAKE OVER FROM HERE, AGENT CARLUTHERS?

OF COURSE, SIR...

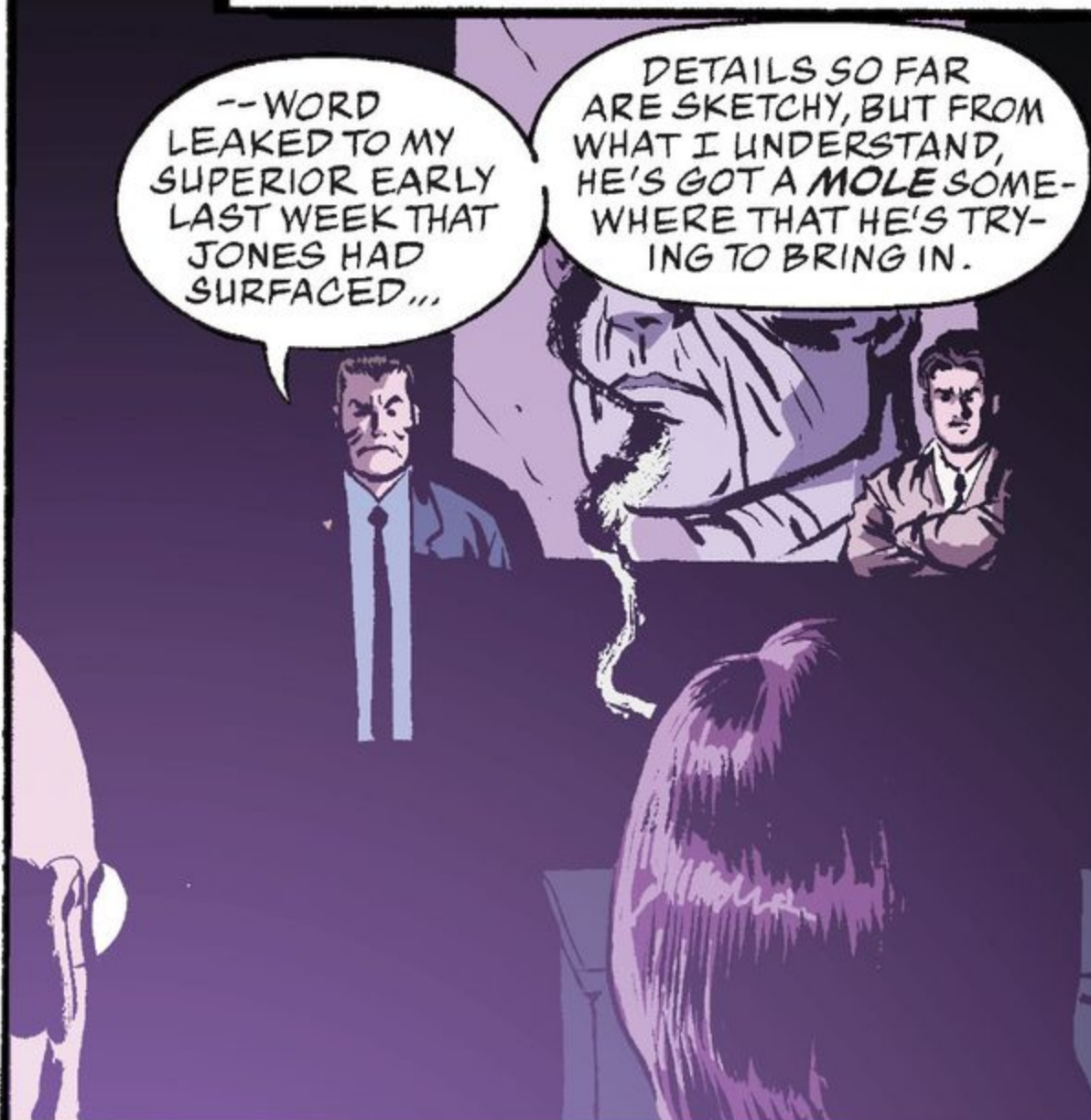
We'd met Agent Lee Caruthers at the start of the meeting. He was my opposite number in a lot of ways...

A high-ranking field agent in the C.I.A. who'd been working for Tao for the last two years. And until that day, none of us even knew he existed...



--WORD LEAKED TO MY SUPERIOR EARLY LAST WEEK THAT JONES HAD SURFACED...

DETAILS SO FAR ARE SKETCHY, BUT FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, HE'S GOT A **MOLE** SOMEWHERE THAT HE'S TRYING TO BRING IN.



ARE WE SUPPOSED TO BE WORRYING HE'S GOT A MOLE IN **OUR** ORGANIZATION?

DIDN'T TAO SAY HE **RETIRED** TEN YEARS AGO? WE HAVEN'T EVEN BEEN **AROUND** THAT LONG...



AS I SAID, MY INTEL SO FAR IS SKETCHY AT BEST.

BUT IT'S MY BELIEF THAT WHOEVER HE'S IN CONTACT WITH IS PART OF THIS ORGANIZATION...



AND WHY IS THAT?



LOCATION, FOR ONE THING. WHY COME TO NEW YORK TO ARRANGE THE EXTRACTION IF HIS MOLE ISN'T HERE, TOO?

JONES HAS CONTACTS ALL OVER THE WORLD IF HE NEEDS THEM.



IF THIS WAS A BRITISH MOLE, HE'D BE CONTACTING MI6, BUT HE'S NOT. HE'S CONTACTING THE C.I.A. AND DEPARTMENT P.S.I. TWO AMERICAN AGENCIES.



I'M AFRAID I AGREE WITH AGENT CARUTHERS. WE MAY HAVE A FOX IN OUR HENHOUSE...



WOULDN'T BE THE FIRST TIME.



NO, INDEED IT WOULDN'T, AGENT CARVER...

THE REAL QUESTION IS, WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?





GOD DAMN IT, YOU TOLD ME YOU WERE **BETTER** THAN THIS, JONES...



CARE TO EXPLAIN THAT REMARK, AGENT?

THEY'RE TRYING TO **FIND YOU**. WORD LEAKED ABOUT YOU BEING BACK--AND ABOUT WHY.

I **FUCKING WARNED** YOU TAO'S GOT PEOPLE ON THE INSIDE!



OF **COURSE** HE DOES. SO, WHO SHOULD I BE WATCHING OUT FOR?

NOT A CHANCE. I'M ONE OF **FOUR PEOPLE** WHO KNOW ABOUT THIS GUY. HE **SUDDENLY DISAPPEARS** BEFORE YOU BRING ME IN, I'M **SCREWED**.



JUST WATCH YOUR **FUCKING BACK**, AND KNOW THAT THE PEOPLE YOU TRUST ARE **NOT** KEEPING THEIR **FUCKING MOUTHS SHUT!**



SOME OF THEM **CAN'T**. THEY HAVE TO ARRANGE **AMNESTY** FOR YOU UNTIL YOUR DEBRIEFING IS OVER.

THEY CAN'T JUST SET THE WHOLE THING UP WITH **NO COMMUNICATION**.



THIS IS **FUCKED**. I'M BETTER OFF WHERE I **AM**, JONES.

YOU COME WALTZING IN AND STIR UP A SHIT CLOUD AND **SUDDENLY EVERYTHING'S AT RISK AGAIN...**



Turns out two nights later is the soonest Sir Malcolm can set it up.

They're long days, filled with fear and internal doubt.



I walk the halls, passing Peter Grimm, passing Tao...

...wondering if this whole thing is some kind of set-up of theirs. A trap for the mole.



What do I really know about Jones? Why do I trust him?



Probably because I'm a fool. A desperate fool.



But there I am, two nights later, playing through every aspect of my escape in my head...

...while locked in Miss Misery's grip...

And then, looking down at her, I have this sudden moment of realization...

She's beautiful. And she's fun. And I'm going to miss her.



She couldn't possibly feel the same, I know, because it goes against her nature...

...and I probably never would've thought about it if I wasn't leaving...



But there's something in her eyes right before she falls asleep that sinks inside me and touches my cold dead heart.

She has helped me survive these last few months, whether she knows it or not.



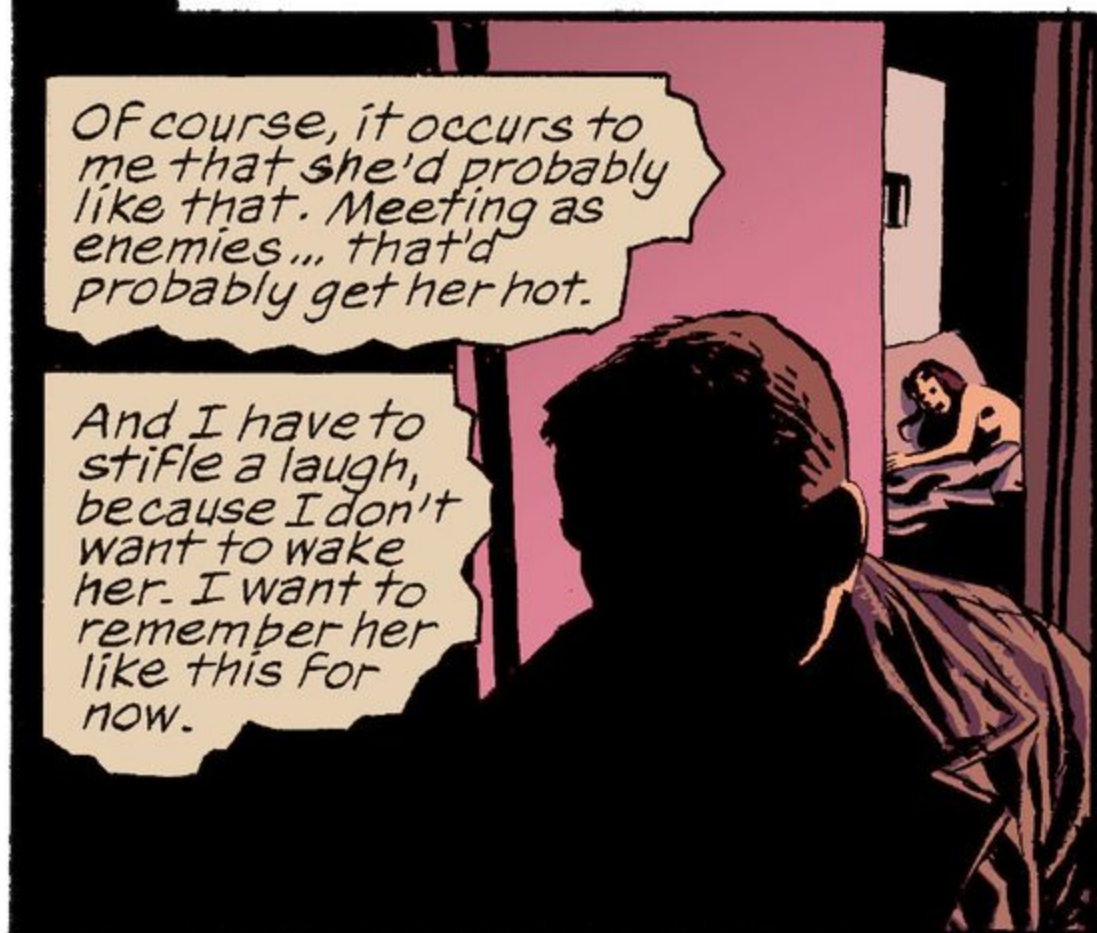
And once I step out this door, if I ever meet her again, it'll be as enemies.

Hell, that's what it's always been, anyway. There just won't be any hiding it after this.



Of course, it occurs to me that she'd probably like that. Meeting as enemies... that'd probably get her hot.

And I have to stifle a laugh, because I don't want to wake her. I want to remember her like this for now.



But the moment that door shuts, I run like hell. I run away...



But there's no way I could've run fast enough, because Caruthers and some of Tao's men are already staking out the meeting place when I get there...



I come in the paranoid route, from the rooftops, and spot them from a block away.



They've got Jones in their sights by the time he spots them.

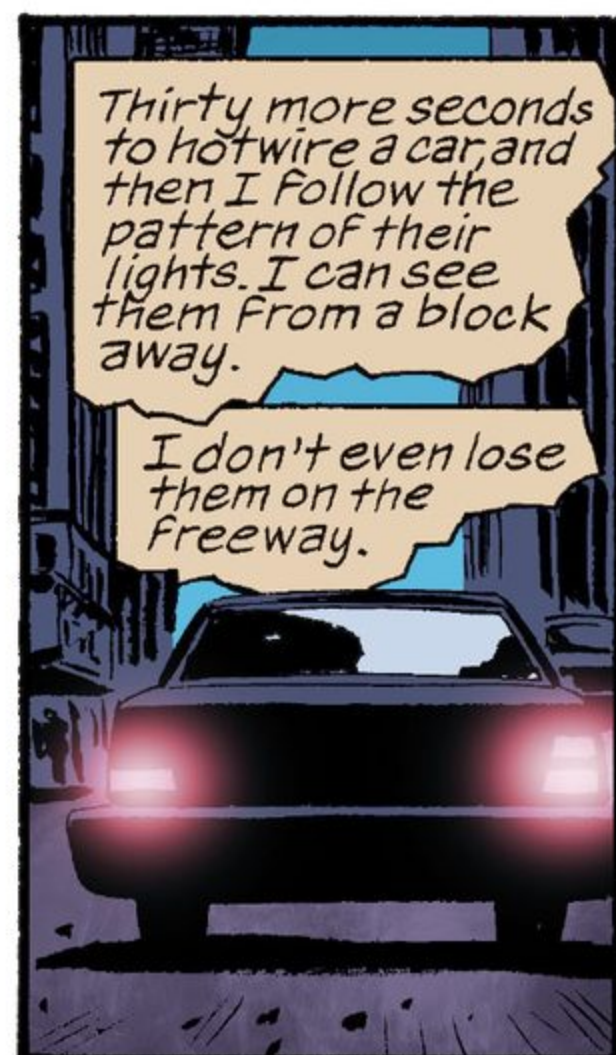


To his credit, he tries to take them. He's right, he is tougher than I thought, but he's old...

...and Tao's Blackguards have enhancements.



All I have time for is one shot. A silenced round pops their right tail light...



Thirty more seconds to hotwire a car, and then I follow the pattern of their lights. I can see them from a block away.

I don't even lose them on the freeway.

Infiltrating the facility they
take him to isn't quite as easy,
but I manage...



Don't know what
this place is. Probably
one of Tao's many
secret holdings...



And if they're questioning
Jones here, that means
Tao won't be long in
arriving himself.



As if I needed
an extra incentive
to move fast...



WELL, I'M NOT
DISAPPOINTED,
SIR MALCOLM...



YOU'RE A BIT OF
A LEGEND, AFTER
ALL... BUT WE'RE
JUST GETTING
STARTED HERE...

...AND WE WILL
BREAK YOU. IF NOT ME,
IT'LL BE MY SUPERIOR.
IF I WERE YOU, I WOULD
WANT IT TO BE ME...



YOU WERE
ME... YOU'D'VE
TALKED
ALREADY...

...YOU
WEAK PIECE
OF... SHIT...



SON OF A
BITCH...

...YOU
STUPID OLD
FUCK...



GO AHEAD...
SHOOT ME...
MAKE YOUR
BOSS REAL
HAPPY...
WON'T IT?



HE'S
RIGHT...



I'M HERE TO PICK UP THE PRISONER.

WHAT? THAT IS NOT THE PLAN... TAO SAID HE WAS COMING ALONE...



GUARD, TAKE MR. CARVER TO THE OFFICE TO AWAIT TAO...



GUARD...?



SHIT!

BLAM
BLAM



GUESS YOU SHOULD'VE READ MY FILE A LITTLE MORE CLOSELY, CARLUTHERS...

YOU... YOU FUCKING TRAITOR... YOU--



plip



SEE... I TOLD YOU THIS'D GO OFF... WITHOUT A HITCH...

YEAH, RIGHT... I'D HATE TO SEE WHEN ONE OF YOUR OPS GOES WRONG...



YOU GOTTA TORCH THIS PLACE, HOLDEN... YOU'RE BLEEDING... DON'T WANT TO GIVE THEM YOUR DNA AT THE SCENE...

GOOD POINT...



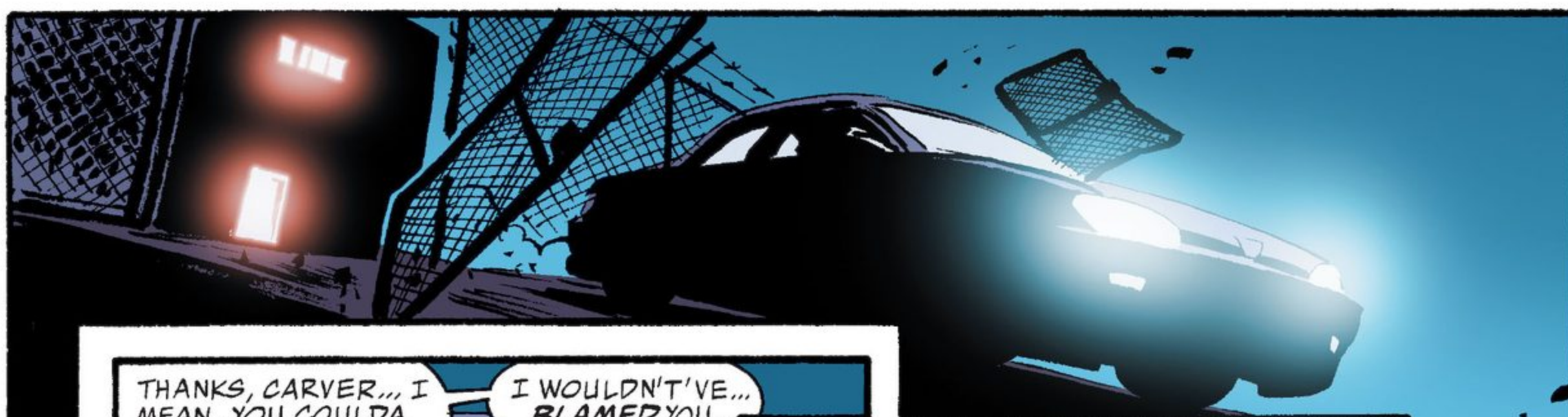
THAT BASTARD... TOOK MY LAST REAL TOOTH...

AH, YOU WEREN'T TAKING CARE OF IT ANYWAY, OLD MAN... ALL THAT DRINKING AND SMOKING...



TRUE... BUT STILL...





THANKS, CARVER... I
MEAN, YOU COULDA
CUT YOUR LOSSES
AND JUST RUN...

I WOULDN'T'VE...
BLAMED YOU...

HEY, C'MON, OLD MAN, YOU THINK I'D
LEAVE YOU IN TAO'S HANDS? HE'D'VE
GOT MY NAME OUT OF YOU INSIDE
AN HOUR...

AND BESIDES,
YOU'RE MY PASS-
PORT BACK TO THE
WORLD...

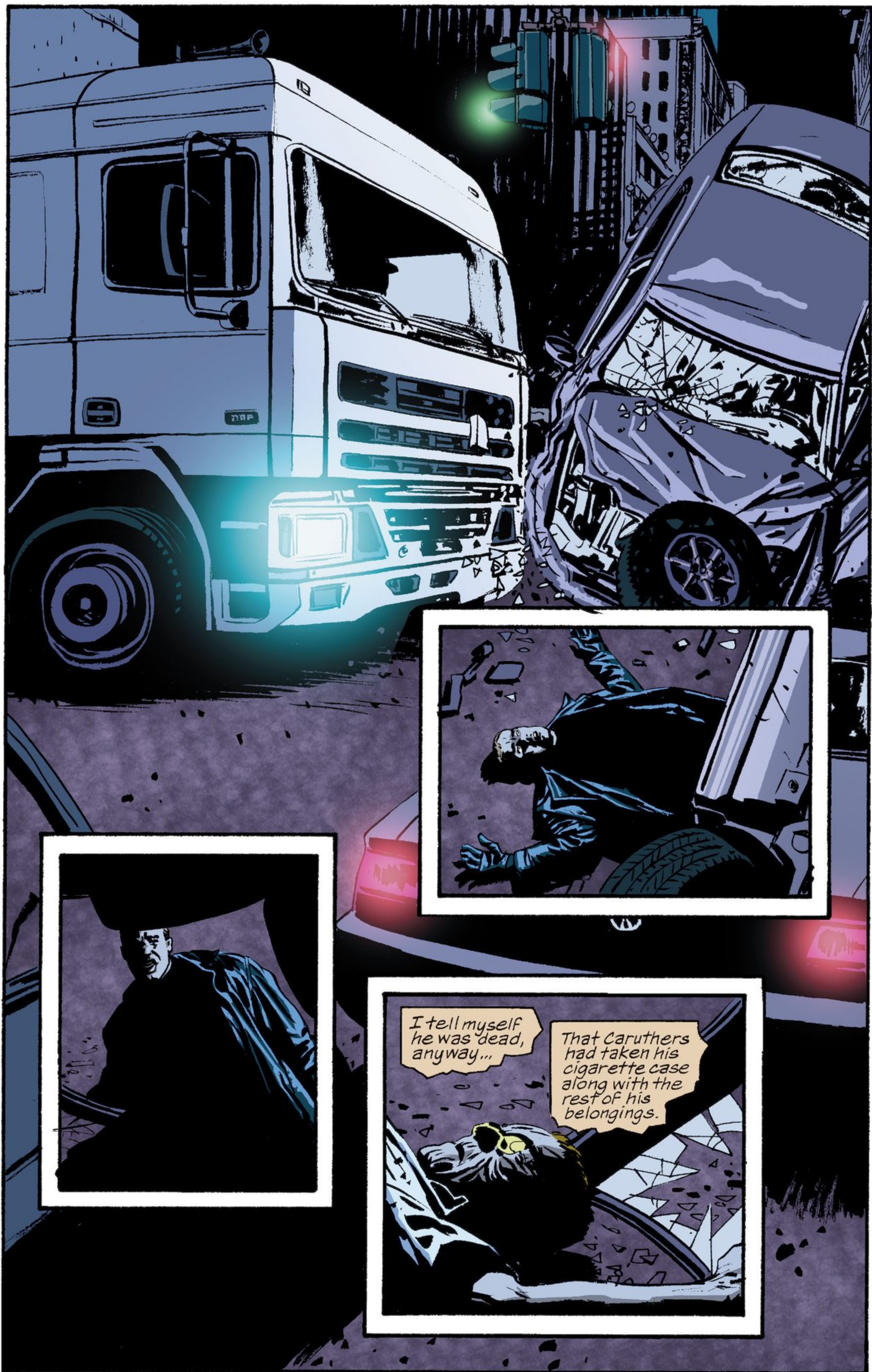
HEY,
WHAT'S
WRONG?

HEART...
NITRO PILLS...
COMPARTMENT
INSIDE...
CIGARETTE
CASE...

SHIT... SHIT
... GOD DAMN
IT.

WHERE
THE FUCK IS
IT?!

УННТ



I tell myself he was dead, anyway...

That Caruthers had taken his cigarette case along with the rest of his belongings.



It doesn't help.



YOU--
YOU OKAY,
MAN?

JUST SHOT RIGHT
THROUGH THAT INTER-
SECTION! I MEAN...
TH'HELL YOU THINKIN',
MAN?



I MEAN--
I MEAN--

WHOA... HOLD
ON! JUST--OH,
JESUS...



IT WAS-- IT WAS AN
ACCIDENT... YOU--YOU
JUST--

I KNOW.

THEN-- THEN
--WHY?

BECAUSE
YOU SAW
ME...

plip



Cops and Firemen.
They'll be here any
second. And I can't have
my description in this
accident report.

... GOD DAMN
YOU, JONES... GOD
DAMN YOU...

